

NEWS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Tom Daschle and Nancy Pelosi

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Pelosi and Daschle Official State of the Union Response as Prepared

Washington, D.C. -- House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle will deliver the official Democratic response to the President's State of the Union address tonight. Below are the Leaders' remarks as prepared for delivery:

**The Democratic Response to the State of the Union
By the Democratic Leaders of the U.S. Congress
U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, January 20, 2004**

“A Question of Priorities”

Part 1: Protecting American Security at Home and Abroad By House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi

The state of our union is indeed strong, due to the spirit of the American people - the creativity, optimism, hard work, and faith of everyday Americans.

The State of the Union address should offer a vision that unites us as a people -- and priorities that move us toward the best America. For inspiration, we look to our brave young men and women in uniform, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their noble service reminds us of our mission as a nation -- to build a future worthy of their sacrifice.

Tonight, from the perspective of ten years of experience on the Intelligence Committee working on national security issues, I express the Democrats' unbending determination to make the world safer for America -- for our people, our interests and our ideals.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Democrats have an unwavering commitment to ensure that America's armed forces remain the best trained, best led, best equipped force for peace the world has ever known. Never before have we been more powerful militarily. But even the most powerful nation in history must bring other nations to our side to meet common dangers.

The President's policies do not reflect that. He has pursued a go-it-alone foreign policy that leaves us isolated abroad and that steals the resources we need for education and health care here at home.

The President led us into the Iraq war on the basis of unproven assertions without evidence; he embraced a radical doctrine of pre-emptive war unprecedented in our history; and he failed to build a true international coalition.

Therefore, American taxpayers are bearing almost all the cost -- a colossal \$120 billion and rising. More importantly, American troops are enduring almost all the casualties -- tragically, 500 killed and thousands more wounded.

MAKING AMERICA SAFER AND MORE SECURE

As a nation, we must show our greatness, not just our strength. America must be a light to the world, not just a missile.

Forty three years ago today, as a college student standing in the freezing cold outside this Capitol Building, I heard President Kennedy issue this challenge in his Inaugural Address: "My fellow citizens of the world," he said, "ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

There is great wisdom in that, but in it there is also greater strength for our country and the cause of a safer world.

Instead of alienating our allies, let us work with them and international institutions so that together we can prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and keep them out of the hands of terrorists.

Instead of billions of dollars in no-bid contracts for politically- connected firms such as Halliburton, and an insistence on American dominance in Iraq, let us share the burden and responsibility with others, so that together we can end the sense of American occupation and bring our troops home safely when their mission is completed.

Instead of the diplomatic disengagement that almost destroyed the Middle East peace process and aggravated the danger posed by North Korea, let us seek to forge agreements and coalitions - so that, together with others, we can address challenges before they threaten the security of the world.

TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY

We must remain focused on the greatest threat to the security of the United States - the clear and present danger of terrorism. We know what we must do to protect America, but this Administration is failing to meet the challenge. Democrats have a better way to ensure our homeland security.

One hundred percent of containers coming into our ports or airports must be inspected. Today, only 3 percent are inspected. One hundred percent of chemical and nuclear plants in the United States must have high levels of security. Today, the Bush Administration has tolerated a much lower standard.

One hundred percent communication in real time is needed for our police officers, firefighters, and all our first responders to prevent or respond to a terrorist attack. Today, the technology is there, but the resources are not. One hundred percent of the enriched uranium and other material for weapons of mass destruction must be secured. Today, the Administration has refused to commit the resources necessary to prevent it from falling into the hands of terrorists.

America will be far safer if we reduce the chances of a terrorist attack in one of our cities than if we diminish the civil liberties of our own people.

THE ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS

As a nation, we must do better to keep faith with our armed forces, their families and our veterans. Our men and women in uniform show their valor every day. On the battlefield, our troops pledge to leave no soldier behind. Here at home, we must leave no veteran behind. We must ensure their health care, their pensions, and their survivors' benefits.

‘THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN IS AT STAKE’

The year ahead offers great opportunity for progress and perhaps new perils still hidden in the shadows of an uncertain world. But you, the American people, have shown again and again that you are equal to any test. Now your example summons all of us in government, Republicans and Democrats, to a higher standard.

This is personal for all of us, in every community across this land. As a mother of five, and now as a grandmother of five, I came into government to help make the future brighter for all of America's children. As much as at any time in my memory, the future of our country and our children is at stake.

Democrats are committed to strengthening the state of our union - to reach for a safer, more prosperous America.

Together, let us make America work for all Americans - let us restore our rightful role of leadership in the world, working with others for "the freedom of man."

I'm now proud to introduce my colleague, the outstanding Senate Democratic leader, Tom Daschle.

Part 2: Building an Opportunity Society for the American People

By Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle

Let there be no doubt: the state of our union is strong -- stronger than the terrorists who seek to harm us and stronger than the challenges that confront us. At the same time, we know that our union can be stronger still.

The President spoke of great goals, and America should never hesitate to push the boundaries of exploration. But neither should we shrink from the great goal of creating a more perfect union here at home.

AN OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY

In his speech, the President asked us to make permanent the tax cuts already passed. He asked us to create more tax shelters for the wealthy, and he asked us to use Social Security money to pay for it. For the last couple of weeks, I've been traveling through my home state of South Dakota, visiting the people and small towns that are America's backbone. And the folks I met were asking something, too: what about us? When do our priorities become America's priorities?

Rather than a society that restricts its rewards to a privileged few, we need an "opportunity society" that allows all Americans to succeed. Our "opportunity society" has at its foundation good jobs, a solid education and quality health care that is affordable and available. We believe that we have to honor the promises we've made to the millions of families who worked hard, played by the rules and have earned a retirement of dignity.

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Our first challenge is to strengthen the economy -- the right way. The true test of America's economic recovery is not measured simply in quarterly profit reports, it's measured in jobs. The massive tax cuts that were supposed to spark an economic expansion have instead led to an economic exodus. To make up for the three million private-sector jobs that have been lost on President Bush's watch, the economy would have to create 226,000 jobs a month through the end of his term. Last month, the economy created only 1,000 new jobs. That's not good enough.

America can't afford to keep rewarding the accumulation of wealth over the dignity of work. Instead of borrowing even more money to give more tax breaks to companies so that they can export even more jobs, we propose tax cuts and policies that will strengthen our manufacturing sector and create good jobs at good wages here at home. We can also

show our patriotism while strengthening agriculture and rural America by labeling all food products with their country of origin.

EDUCATION

Education is the second key to our "opportunity society." Two years ago, the President signed a new education law. The heart of that law was a promise. The federal government would set high standards for every student, and hold schools responsible for results. In exchange, schools would receive the resources to meet the new standards. America's schools are holding up their end of the bargain - the President has not held up his. Millions of children are being denied the better teachers, smaller classes, and extra help they were promised.

At the same time, the President's tax cuts have put states in such a bind that they're being forced to raise the cost of college. Since President Bush took office, the average tuition at a four-year public college has increased by nearly \$600. The America our parents gave us was a place in which everyone had a chance to go to a good school, and then to college, community college or vocational school, regardless of family income. Our children deserve nothing less.

HEALTH CARE AND MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Third, our "opportunity society" is built on the belief that affordable, available health care is not a luxury, but a basic foundation of a truly compassionate society.

Today, 43.6 million Americans - almost all of them from working families - have no health insurance. That's over 3.8 million more than when President Bush took office. Those Americans lucky enough to have health insurance have seen their premiums go up each of the last three years. The increase in premiums that middle-income families have seen over the past three years is larger than the four-year tax cut they've been promised. This is an invisible tax increase on middle class families.

Tonight, three years into his Administration, the President acknowledged that the rapidly rising cost of health care, and the increasing number of Americans with no health coverage, are problems. But the solutions he proposed - more tax cuts - are not the right ones. More tax cuts will do little to make health care more affordable or reduce the number of people without insurance, and they will weaken health coverage for those who now have it.

When I was driving around South Dakota this summer, I met a nurse in Sioux Falls who has cancer. She told me that she couldn't afford the \$1,500 a month her drugs cost. She told me that she was going to die -- that she was a lost cause. But, she said, we must solve this problem; don't turn more people into lost causes.

We believe that the federal government should use the power of 40 million Americans to lower prescription drug prices and to allow us to get more affordable drugs from Canada

- instead of forbidding both. Drug companies and insurance companies are the only ones who benefit from that restriction - not the American people -- and that's why we want to change it.

RETIREMENT

And in our vision of an "opportunity society," promises made to those who have worked a lifetime will be honored in retirement. That's why we believe that America's pension system needs to be strengthened, and that Social Security's benefit should be a guarantee, not a gamble.

Only when every American who wants to work, can, when every child goes to a good school and has the opportunity to go further, only when health care is available and affordable for every American, when a lifetime of work guarantees a retirement with dignity and when America is secure at home and our strength abroad is respected and not resented -- only then will we have a union as strong as the American people. That's the America we want to build, because that's the union the American people deserve. Thank you for listening, good night, and God bless America.

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